

WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506RELEASE IN
FULL

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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SUBJECT: Meeting with Russian Political Leaders

PARTICIPANTS: U.S. Participants:
The President
Secretary Christopher
Secretary Rubin
Ambassador Pickering
Anthony Lake
Strobe Talbott
Coit Blacker (Notetaker)DECLASSIFICATION
AUTHORITY: Geoffrey W.
Chapman, Senior Reviewer,
A/GIS/IPS, 3/19/2019

Russian Participants:

Ruslan Aushev
Boris Federov
Yegor Gaydar
Sergey Glazev
Yekaterina Lakhova
Mikhail Lapshin
Yuriy Nozhikov
Yegor Stroyev
Grigoriy Yavlinskiy
Gennadiy ZhyuganovDATE, TIME: May 11, 1995
AND PLACE: Spaso House, Moscow

Following brief welcoming remarks by Ambassador Pickering, the President opened the meeting by thanking the Russian political leaders for coming and by expressing his interest in an open exchange of views, ideas and experiences.

The President made four points in his initial comments. First, he had come to Moscow to commemorate the end of World War II and to take note of the contribution of the Russian people to the war effort -- a contribution that the West had never properly acknowledged. Second, the President stressed his determination to continue working with the new Russia and to pursue cooperation for the benefit of the American and the Russian people; such cooperation, the President noted, has already resulted in enhanced security for both sides.

Third, the President spoke of his interest in learning about events in Russia: the trend toward greater regionalism or regional empowerment; the formation of political parties; and the

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impact of political and economic change on the people of Russia. Regarding the latter, the President noted that "downward pressures" on wages are making it "tough to get by" and that in many countries today people are "working harder and realizing less." The President spoke of his optimism about the future, but admitted that this is a time of great change. Fourth, the President, looking ahead 50 years, said he anticipated a different set of global security challenges from those we confront today. He drew particular attention to the threats likely to be posed by terrorists (and terrorism), the possible use of very small nuclear weapons and chemical and/or biological agents against innocent populations, and the danger of organized crime. Our differences notwithstanding, the President said, we need to cooperate to meet these kinds of challenges, especially the struggles against terrorism and organized crime.

Liberal reformer and likely presidential candidate Grigoriy Yavlinskiy expressed his personal pleasure at seeing the President in Moscow "these days" and thanked him for coming. He characterized the President's remarks at Poklonnaya Gora on May 9 as "moving" and said the he understood the reasons for the President's visit. He thanked the President for his courage in deciding to make the trip and for his support of the new Russia. In saying these things, Yavlinskiy made clear, he was expressing the sentiments of many, many Russians.

Coming to what he described as his main points, Yavlinskiy insisted that today's Russia is in the process of "creating democracy." This gives rise to both euphoria and despair, neither of which is warranted. "There is good and bad in Russia and it will be this way for years." What we need, he said, are "cool brains and warm hearts." In Russia, Yavlinskiy argued, we have something like "half of a democracy": the people and the press say (and write) what they want, and yet the war in Chechnya -- which 80 percent of the people oppose -- goes on. This is the case in many areas, he said. It's neither an advantage nor a disadvantage, just a fact of life and we'd all better recognize it as such.

Yegor Gaydar, Duma deputy and radical reformer, began by noting his broad agreement with much of what Yavlinskiy had said. He understood how hard it was for the President to come to Moscow for V-E Day, given the war in Chechnya, and he expressed his gratitude to the President for the decision he had made.

Gaydar noted that many within Russia are trying to reestablish what he termed "Cold War relations" between Moscow and Washington and to stir up anti-American sentiments. In the U.S. there are many who feel the same way, "who want Russia to be the enemy." This, he insisted, is contrary to the long-term interests of both

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countries. Stability in relations is what is really needed, now and in the future. Much will depend, Gaydar said, on the outcome of the December parliamentary elections and he expressed the hope that he and others will be in a position following the elections to "overcome these negative trends."

Russian Communist Party Leader Gennadiy Zhyuganov described the domestic scene as "very critical" and outlined three possible futures for Russia: a "Balkan outcome" (in which order gives way to the kind of violence and chaos associated with the ongoing struggles in the former Yugoslavia); a Colombia-type outcome (in which the government both struggles against and coexists with a criminal cartel that is almost as well armed); and a constitutional outcome (in which scheduled elections are held and the opportunity exists to improve the situation). Zhyuganov expressed the hope that the U.S. would "weigh in" on the side of legal elections -- without which the situation within Russia could not improve.

Given the combination of Russia's history (favoring what he labeled a certain "leftist mood") and the deep post-communist depression (which has left 20 million either unemployed or underemployed), Zhyuganov argued for the continuing relevance of a "left-flank party" -- one that understands the suffering of the people and that represents their interests. The Russian Communist Party, according to Zhyuganov, understands the value of (political) pluralism, as well as the needs of the working classes and the poor. Whatever the outcome of the struggle over Russia and her future, the Russian Communist Party will continue to favor friendly relations with the U.S.

Zhyuganov concluded by expressing his gratitude to the President for undertaking the visit to Moscow at this time.

Former Finance Minister Boris Fedorov focused on five issues in his remarks. First, he noted that Russia's long-awaited financial stabilization seems to be at hand -- a development that appears to arouse at least as much fear as it does relief on the part of the Russian population. Second, he argued that separatism within Russia is on the increase, which also has given rise to wide-spread popular anxiety and concern about the future. Third, he described without elaboration the existence of various international security problems, taking particular note of plans to expand NATO and the opposition to those plans from within Russia. Fourth, he expressed alarm at 1) the possible cancellation of the December parliamentary elections, or 2) possible vote-tampering, should the elections proceed as scheduled. He appealed to the President to help ensure honest and fair elections. Fifth, Fedorov noted that none of the G7 countries that have provided aid to Russia get much credit for

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their assistance (implying that little of the assistance has had a visible impact) and suggested some retargeting of U.S. aid -- away from existing programs and toward education and retraining efforts.

Fedorov thanked the President for coming to Moscow, volunteering the view that such a decision could not have been easy.

Sergey Glazev, the young leader of the Democratic Party of Russia, linked the future of the planet to the development of U.S.-Russian relations, which, he said, will be largely determined by events in Russia. He accorded particular importance to Russia's ability to accomplish a democratic transfer of power in 1995-96 and to begin to recover economically.

Glazev praised FDR's New Deal and cited the lack of a comparable series of initiatives as one reason for Russia's failure to turn the corner economically. What's worse, according to Glazev, is that Russia's economic hard times are associated with the policies of the IMF, which most Russians believe is an agency of the U.S. government. Glazev proposed -- partly to counter this perception -- that a group of Nobel laureates from economics and the sciences travel to Russia to discuss the real problems confronting the country and to sketch out some possible solutions. If by the end of the year "nothing has changed," Glazev warned, the outlook for free and fair elections will be bleak, given the Executive's lack of accountability to either the parliament or the voting public more broadly.

Yuriy Nozhikov, governor of Irkutsk Oblast, thanked the President for his V-E Day visit to honor the memory of those who died fighting fascism. He raised two issues. The first concerned the devolution of political power from the "center" to the regions and, on balance, the positive effect this had had, both on the process of democratic development and in terms of economic performance.

The second issue concerned economic security, especially the problem of income disparity. Nozhikov expressed the view that as the gap separating rich and poor increases, so too does the possibility of "some kind of explosion." To prevent such a crisis he urged intensified international efforts to guarantee a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Mikhail Lapshin, chairman of the Agrarian Party of Russia, began by emphasizing the importance of a multiparty system to Russia's democratic development, focusing in particular on the need for a political party to represent the country's large number of farmers. "In our heart of hearts," Lapshin declared, "we

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[Russians] are an agro-community. He went on to argue that the key to Russia's rejuvenation, its rebirth, is the economic recovery of the agricultural sector. Once this is underway, according to Lapshin, "everything else will follow." The Agrarian Party, he concluded, is well positioned to help "preserve" Russia during these difficult times and "to carry the banner of Russia's national interest."

The leader of the Women of Russia faction, Yekaternia Lakhova, thanked the President for coming to Moscow on V-E Day; she also expressed her appreciation to Mrs. Clinton for her leadership on women's issues.

Lakhova described the institutionalization of political parties in Russia and the holding of parliamentary elections scheduled for December as critical to the development of democracy in Russia; failure to follow through with elections would be a violation of the constitution. The constitution is already being violated by the Executive branch, according to Lakhova. The violations take two forms: the Executive's willful disregard of legislative prerogatives; and the Executive's failure to enforce various social rights, including the provision of health care and education. Lakhova also criticized the government for its lack of attention to women's issues and to the plight of women more generally. Women, particularly in the work force, continue to be discriminated against in Russian society; they are also often the victims of various forms of violence, especially spousal abuse.

Lakhova made a plea for the admission of Russia to a number of European institutions, mentioning by name the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. Absent Russia's full participation, she argued, these and others organizations devoted to the development of a strong and secure Europe will never be effective. She urged Russia's prompt and unconditional admission to these institutions.

Yegor Stroyev, governor of Orel Oblast, noted that his constituents feel very strongly about the need to preserve peace and enhance security, which he attributed to his region's having lost 700,000 people during World War II. Stroyev drew the President's attention to two issues. He underscored the people's strong commitment to reform; the real questions, he argued, are "who shall conduct these reforms" and "why has it taken so long to get out of the [present] crisis?" The party that can answer these two questions convincingly, Stroyev insisted, will lead the country out of crisis and onto the path of recovery. Stroyev also made the point that Russians have become very concerned about criminal activity (both organized and random) and the impact of that activity on society and their quality of life.

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Stroyev's second point concerned the shifting balance of power between the "center" and Russia's many regions. Although the shift in power from the former to the latter has been exaggerated, the regions are increasingly in control of their own destinies -- a trend that Stroyev endorsed. Elections, he argued, are a good and necessary thing but ultimately of little consequence without meaningful economic recovery. "If we can find thoughtful people [to carry out appropriate economic reforms], Russia will have no trouble overcoming her current travails."

The last of the political leaders to speak was Ruslan Aushev, president of the Ingush Republic. Aushev devoted most of his attention to the problem of inter-ethnic relations in Russia and to the war in Chechnya. He cautioned that without a nationality policy appropriate to and commensurate with the current highly charged situation in Russia, the attempts at economic and political reform, however well-intentioned, would be insufficient to lift the country out of crisis. Aushev insisted that the overwhelming majority of the 110 ethnic communities in Russia want to live in peace with one another but that current policy makes that difficult.

Aushev interpreted the Russian military campaign in Chechnya as a case of Russian nationalism gone too far -- an example of national zeal "that could slip over to fascism." He said that both the Chechen and the Ingush peoples had suffered greatly under Stalin and been systematically suppressed during the Soviet period. Given this history, Aushev continued, "We need to listen to them." He urged the start of serious negotiations with the Chechen people in order to bring the fighting to an end and warned that a failure to find an acceptable political outcome to the war in Chechnya could produce another Afghanistan. "I know what that means," Aushev warned, "I was there." Aushev laid the ultimate blame for Chechnya on Yeltsin's advisers, who "did not understand the situation and so misadvised him."

As several before him had done, Aushev underscored the importance of regional economic reform, arguing that if only Moscow were to profit from the current situation the overall effect would be to engender resentment. If the regions are strong, according to Aushev, Russia will be strong. The most effective way to combat crime and corruption, he argued, is to guarantee that as many people as possible have a stake in the success of the reform process. Making money, Aushev claimed, is a surest antidote to both class warfare and inter-ethnic conflict.

The President thanked the Russian political leaders for coming and expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to meet with them. He noted that the problems discussed were very real but

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that the intelligence and energy displayed by the group spoke well of the country's leadership.

The President made a number of points in response to comments made in discussion. First, on Yavlinskiy's description of Russia's as being "half a democracy," the President stressed the critical importance of regularly scheduled elections -- the single most important vehicle by which the people hold the leadership accountable for its actions and decisions. Second, the President argued for keeping the focus in U.S.-Russia relations on that which the two sides can do together; the people of the United States and Russia, he argued, are best served when their leaders can find ways to cooperate. Third, in reference to European security the President underscored U.S. support for Russia's full participation in the effort to create an integrated and secure Europe, taking particular care to emphasize that NATO is not now nor will it be directed against Russia and its interests. The development of the NATO-Russia relationship, the President added, is one of the ways that we seek to prevent Europe's redivision. The Alliance enables the United States to remain committed to Europe's security and is therefore a force for stability. The American objective, the President concluded, remains an peaceful, integrated Europe.

Fourth, the President pointed to three goals that should guide the provision of international financial assistance to Russia: 1) that the assistance generate wealth; 2) that its effects be equitable and serve to preserve the social contract; and 3) that it impose fiscal discipline on the government but that it do so "with a heart." Fifth, the President strongly endorsed the concept of regional economic development and, drawing on his own experience as a governor, recommended the design and implementation of a series of strategic plans to help further that objective. Sixth, the President argued that in the 21st century nations that can combine strong, stable social relations and ethnically diverse populations -- the United States and Russia being two prime candidates -- are likely to demonstrate greater energy, creativity and productivity than their less diverse counterparts.

In closing the meeting the President once again thanked the group for making the time to join him at Spaso House. Endorsing the idea of more aid to Russia's regions, he promised to review the geographic distribution of U.S. assistance programs. He also noted Secretary Rubin's interest in the possible visit to Russia of a group of Nobel laureates pledged to consider the proposal upon his return to the United States.

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